Entry Title: Putting Yourself In Someone Else's Shoes

Name: Charlotte Ball   **School:** Scotch Oakburn College

Entry:

I stare through the window as I drive to school. What matters to me? That's a difficult question to answer. Lots of things matter to me; sexism, racism, equality, random acts of kindness and even how ties should not be a mandatory part of the school uniform (do ties even matter??), but none of it feels right. In the end, my decision is easy. All of those topics (though maybe not the one about school ties) link back to the same thing: empathy. Over all other values and issues on planet earth, empathy is, to me, what truly matters.

As a child, I was constantly told to put myself in the shoes of others. For a while, I had no idea what that even meant. As I grew older, the true meaning became clear, but empathizing with others, or even 'putting myself in someone else's shoes' didn't really seem that important. It didn't matter that my best friend was grumpy because her parents were getting a divorce, or that my little sister snuck my makeup because she was getting bullied for her pimples, it just mattered that my best friend was grumpy, and my sister stole my concealer. I never understood that people always make decisions for a reason, and, more often than not, they don't make 'bad choices' out of pure spite. It wasn't until a lack of empathy affected me, personally, that the meaning and importance of empathy started to ring true within.

At the end of eighth grade, I started having struggles with my health. For a while, I was forced to sit out of PE class, not participate in school sport or even enjoy the things I love because of the undiagnosed illness plaguing my body. I was weak, sad and at one of the most vulnerable points in my life and there was nothing that I could do. As I struggled, some of those around me, even ones I considered to be friends, went behind my back, saying that I clearly must be faking it, with no better reason than it's not as obvious as a broken leg or a bald head. Words like those can only ever be forgiven, not forgotten.

Since then, empathy has taken upmost priority in my life. As a society, we are in an empathetic crisis and it sickens me to the very core that some aren't willing to make a change. Empathy is essential; it is the basis of human civilisation itself and is of absolute importance. Empathy is what makes us happy, and it allows us to emotionally connect with the experiences of others.

With more empathy in the world, we wouldn't be struggling so much as a community with racism, sexism, inequality and other important issues. We wouldn't discriminate against others because of their background or experiences. We wouldn't make judgements without knowing the full story first. As Barack Obama said, 'It's the lack of empathy that makes it very easy for us to plunge into wars. It's the lack of empathy that allows us to ignore the homeless on the streets.'

It took a long time for me to realise the importance of empathy, but once I did, I realised that each and every one of us needs empathy. At first, when asked 'What matters to me?', an answer was tough to find. Now, however, the answer is obvious. Empathy is a quality of character that has the ability to change the world, and that is what matters most of all.